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THE DIALECTIC UNITY IN EMERSON'S PROSE.

BY W. T. HARRIS.

It has often been said that there is no unity in Emerson's prose essays, and, that they consist of a vast number of brilliant statements, loosely connected and bound into paragraphs, with only such unity as is given by the lids of the volume. We hear it said that the experiment has been tried of reading an entire essay, sentence by sentence, backward from the end, without injury to the sense. This lack of order and connection has even been praised as giving variety of form and freshness of style.

While it is true that there is no parading of syllogistic reasoning in Emerson's essays, and no ratiocination, there is quite sufficient unity of a higher kind if one will but once comprehend the thoughts with any degree of clearness.

In a work of literary art, such as a drama or a novel, we expect organic unity as well as logical unity. There must be a beginning, in which we form our acquaintance with the persons, their surroundings, and the peculiarities of character and situation; then a middle, in which character and situation develop into collisions as a natural result; then a solution of the collision by one mode or another, restoring the equilibrium in the social whole.

In the prose essay we cannot expect organic unity, but we may expect rhetorical unity and logical unity.

There need be no formal syllogisms; the closest unity of the logical kind is the dialectic unity that begins with the simplest and most obvious phase of the subject, and discovers by investigation the next phase that naturally follows. It is an unfolding of the subject according to its natural growth in experience. Starting with this view, we shall discover this and that defect, this and that necessary correction, and in the end we shall reach a better insight, which, of course, will be the second step in our treatise, and must be followed out in the same way as before. Such development of a theme exhibits and expounds the genesis of conviction, and is the farthest removed from mere dogmatism. We pass through all shades of opinion, adopting and rejecting them in succession, on our way to the true final conclusion.

There is no logical method equal to this dialectic one that expounds the genesis of the subject. When we have reached the conclusion we have exhausted the subject, and seen the necessity of our result. Such is the method that Plato describes and indorses in the seventh book of his "Republic." To be sure, the untrained intellect will often get confused amid the labyrinth of conflicting opinions, just as the callow young men did when Socrates applied his method to their theories. The reader is apt to expect a consistency of opinion from the beginning to the end. Difference of views bewilders him.

Emerson has furnished us many very wonderful examples of dialectic treatment of his subject. But he has been very careful to avoid the show of ratiocination and the parade of proof-making. The object of his writing was to present truth, and to produce insight, and not to make proselytes.

The student of literature who wishes to learn the dialectic art, and, at the same time, to become acquainted with the genesis of Emerson's view of the world, should study the essay on "Experience" in the second series of essays. In this wonderful piece of writing we have a compend of his insights into life and nature arranged in dialectic order. Master his treatment of the topics, and you will discover what constitute real steps of progress in experience, and at the same time you will learn how the first grows into the second and that into the next, and so on to the highest view of the world that he has attained, or to the final view reached by men of deepest insight, called seers. He names these steps or stadia in experience, (1) illusion, (2) temperament, (3) succession, (4) surface, (5) surprise, (6) reality, and (7) subjectiveness.

(1) The first phase of experience, according to him, brings us to the consciousness of illusion. This is a great step. The *naïve* man without culture of any sort has not reflected enough to reach this point. He rests in the conviction that all about him is really just what he sees it. He does not perceive the relativity of things. But at the first start in culture, long since begun even among the lowest savages, there appears the conviction that there is more in things than appears at first sight. Things are fragments of larger things; facts are fragments of larger facts. Change of the totality of conditions changes the thing or fact that is before us. Things escape us, and thus "dream delivers us to dream, and there is no

end to illusion. Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and, as we pass through them, they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus."

What experience comes next after this one of illusion? Evidently the perception of conditioning circumstance, the perception of fate or external influence, which may be called temperament. (2) Structure or temperament "prevails over everything of time, place, and condition, and is inconsumable in the flames of religion." When experience has exhausted the view of temperament it finds that it has learned the necessity of succession in objects. For there is a process underlying things, and we see that what made us explain illusion by temperament was the discovery that things changed through external influences. Now we see a little better, and understand that there is succession—one phase giving way to another, and thus exhibiting a series of influences instead of one final result. Temperament therefore, is no finality, for it produces no ultimate state or condition, but succeeds only in making a transitory impression.

(3) We pass out of this stadium of experience and enter on the theory of the world that sees change and succession according to some law or other. We look now for that law. When we see the law we shall understand the order of sequence, and can map out the orbit of life and of things. We shall see the true order of genesis.

This view of the necessary order of sequence is no longer a view of mere change, but a view of the whole, and hence a view of the fixed and stable. The orbit remains though the planet wanders perpetually.

(4) Emerson calls the view of the law of change "surface," as if the seeing of a line as a whole were the seeing of a surface. Various tadia of opinion there might be on this plane of experience. As very narrow orbit or a very wide one might be computed for the cycle of succession. The progress of experience will correct the narrow view. We think to-day that we have taken in all the metamorphoses of the object of investigation, but to-morrow we discover new ones and have to enlarge our description. "Surface" expands and we make new theories of the law. We are, however, dealing with the law of cause and effect, and cannot for-

mulate the whole under it, for the whole cannot be cause of something else or the effect of some other being.

(5) Emerson calls the next form of experience "surprise," because it begins with the insight made in some high moment of life, when for the first time one gets a glimpse of the form of the whole. What must be the form of the whole, you ask? The whole does not admit of such predicates as we apply to the part or fragment. The dependent has one law, and the independent has another. The dependent presupposes something, it is a relative existence and its being is in another. The independent is self-contained, self-active, self-determined, *causa sui*. The first insight is a "surprise," and so is the second insight; all of the high moments of experience admit us to "surprises," for we see the fountain of pure energy and self-determination, in place of the limitations of things, and the derivative quality of objects which receive only their allotted measures of being. The soul opens into the sea of creative energy, inexhaustible and ever-imparting.

By these moments of "surprise," therefore, we ascend to a new place of experience, no longer haunted by these dismal spectres of illusion, temperament, change, and surface or mechanic fixed laws. Things are not fragments of a vast machine, nor are men links in a cosmic process that first develops and then crushes them. Things do not exist in succession, as it before seemed to us, but the true, real existence that we have found is always the same.

(6) We enter through the moments of surprise into the realm of insight into reality, hence *reality* is Emerson's sixth category of experience. "By persisting to read or think, this region gives further sign of itself, as it were, in flashes of light, in sudden discoveries of its profound beauty and repose, as if the clouds that covered it parted at intervals and showed the approaching traveller the inland mountains, with the tranquil eternal meadows spread at their base, whereon flocks graze and shepherds pipe and dance."

(7) One more step experience takes—it identifies the deepest reality as of one nature with itself. The absolute is mind. Emerson names this step of insight subjectiveness, because in it we arrive at the conviction that the absolute is subject and not merely unconscious law or power. At this highest point of experience

we reach the station of the seer, the culmination of human experience. The seer as philosopher sees the highest principle to be reason; the poet sees the world to be the expression of reason; the prophet and law-giver sees reason as the authoritative, regulative principle of life; the hero sees reason as a concrete guiding force in society.

In a certain sense all of Emerson's writings are expansions and confirmations of some one of these phases of experience. The essay on the "Over-Soul" treats of surprise and reality; that on Circles treats of succession, surface, and reality, under other names; that on Spiritual Laws on reality and subjectiveness; that on Fate treats of temperament and succession; those on Worship, History, Gifts, Heroism, Love and such titles, treat of subjectiveness. His treatises on concrete themes use these insights perpetually as solvent principles—but always with fresh statement and new resources of poetic expression.

There is nowhere in all literature such sustained flight toward the sun—"a flight," as Plotinus calls it, "of the alone to the alone"—as that in the essay on Over-Soul, wherein Emerson, at great length, unfolds the insights, briefly but inadequately explained under the topic of "surprise" in the essay on experience. It would seem as if each paragraph stated the idea of the whole, and then again that each sentence in each paragraph reflected entire the same idea.

Where there is no genesis there can be no dialectic unity. The absolute is not a becoming but a self-identical activity. In those essays in which Emerson has celebrated this doctrine of the highest reality, and its subjectivity or rational nature, and its revelation to us, he writes in a style elevated above dialectic unity. These essays do not have dialectic unity only because they have a higher form of unity—that of absolute identity. Each is in all and all is in each.

To give one specimen of this I offer a very short analysis of the contents of the essay on "The Over-Soul." He says in substance that man has some moments in his life when he sees deeply into reality; what he sees then has authority over the other parts of his life. He sees principles of justice, love, freedom, and power—attributes of God. This seeing is the common element in all minds, and transcendent of the limitations of particular in-

dividuals. Just as events flow down from a hidden source, so these ideas and insights descend into the mind. He calls this the "over-soul," "a unity within which every man's being is contained and made one with every other. Although we live in division and succession, and see the world piece by piece, yet the soul is the whole, and this is the highest law." These glimpses of the eternal verity come on occasions of conversation, reverie, remorse, dreams, and times of passion. We learn that the soul is not an organ, but that which animates all organs; not a faculty, but a light, and the master of the intellect and will. Individual man is only the organ of the soul. These deeps of the spiritual nature are accessible to all men at some time. The sovereignty of the over-soul is shown by its independence of all limitation. Time, space, and circumstance do not change its attributes. Its presence does not make a progress measurable by time, but it produces metamorphoses causing us to ascend from one plane of experience to the next—as great a change as from egg to worm, or from worm to fly. Society and institutions reveal this common nature or the higher person, or impersonal one—for, in order to prevent the confusion of attributing to the over-soul the passions and imperfections of human personality, Emerson sometimes speaks of Him as impersonal (using Cousin's expression). This revelation of the divine is a disclosure of what is universal, and not the telling of fortunes. There is no concealment when in the presence of its light; the reality appears through all its disguises. The growth of the intellect as well as of the character obeys the same law. The emotion of the sublime accompanies the influx of its light. Its presence distinguishes genius and talent. Faith, worthy of the name, is faith in these transcendent affirmations of the soul. Thus revering the soul, man "will calmly front the morrow in the negligency of that trust which carries God with it, and so hath already the whole future in the bottom of the heart."

In his book on "Nature," his first published work, Emerson developed substantially the same views, with a system of classification much like that in the essay on experience, and showing a genesis in the same dialectic form. (1) Nature for use or "commodity," as he calls it, is the first aspect recognized. After food, clothing, and shelter comes next nature's service to man in satisfying the spiritual want of the (2) beautiful. Then through this

comes the symbolic expression of human nature through its correspondence with material nature, and thus arises (3) language. Fourthly, nature is a (4) discipline, educating understanding and the reason, and also the will and conscience. Then the transition to (5) idealism is easy. Nature is for the education of man, and this lesson is taught us in five distinct ways. Sixthly, we arrive at the knowledge of the (6) one spirit that originates both nature and man, and reveals its nature in the ethical and intellectual constitution of the mind and its correspondences in nature. Thus from nature we come to the over-soul, or what was called reality and subjectivity in the essay on experience. The eighth and final chapter of *Nature* draws practical conclusions, making application of the doctrine to life: "The problem of restoring to the world original and eternal beauty is solved by the redemption of the soul. The ruin or blank that we see when we look at nature is in our own eye. The axis of vision is not coincident with the axis of things, and so they appear not transparent, but opaque. Build, then, your own world. As fast as you conform your life to the pure idea in your mind, the world will unfold its great proportions."

Emerson looks on the world of nature and man as the revelation that the over-soul makes to him, and accordingly looks reverently toward it, and through it, to the great soul of souls, and always sees, under whatever guise, some good. He finds help in everything. He helps every one, too, most by teaching to them the significance of the world as he has found it.

This thought of the revelation of the soul in man and nature is the idea that forms the unity of all that he has written, whether it be in essays like the "Over-Soul," or in historical and critical studies like "English Traits and Representative Men," or in poems of nature like "Monadnoc." One will find everywhere, though under slightly differing names, the elements of experience described in this sublime poem prefixed to the essay on Experience:

"The lords of life, the lords of life,
I saw them pass
In their own guise,
Like and unlike,
Portly and grim,
Use and surprise,

Surface and dream,
 Succession swift and spectral wrong
 Temperament without a tongue,
 And the inventor of the game,
 Omnipresent without name;
 Some to see, some to be guessed,
 They marched from east to west:
 Little man, least of all,
 Among the legs of his guardians tall,
 Walked about with puzzled look.
 Him by the hand dear nature took,
 Dearest nature, strong and kind,
 Whispered 'Darling, never mind!
 To-morrow they will wear another face,
 The founder thou; these are thy race!'

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS.

SELECTIONS IN PROSE AND VERSE.

BY WILLIAM ELLERY CHANNING.

[From the *Gulshan I Raz*, the Mystic Rose-Garden of Sa'd ud din Mahmud Shabistari, born, in the year 1250, near Tabriz,—a *résumé* of Mr. Whinfield's rendering.]

(Concluded from October Number, 1883.)

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE MERCIFUL, THE COMPASSIONATE.

In the name of him who taught the soul to think,
 And kindled the heart's lamp with the light of soul,
 By Whose light the two worlds were illumined,
 By Whose grace the dust of Adam bloomed with roses,
 That Almighty one who, in the twinkling of an eye,
 From Raf and Nan brought forth the two worlds.¹
 What time the Raf of his power breathed on the pen,²
 It cast thousands of pictures on the page of Not-being,
 From that breath proceeded the soul of Adam;

¹ *Raf*, the material, and *Nan*, the spiritual, or "world of command."

² *Raf*, power, force; *pen*, universal reason.